

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 187 045

EC 124 310

AUTHOR Cohen, Libby
 TITLE Stereotyping of Learning Disabled and Remedial Reading Students by Teachers.
 PUB DATE Apr 80
 NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children (58th, Philadelphia, PA, April, 1980, Session B-7).
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Exceptional Child Research; *Labeling (of Persons); *Learning Disabilities; *Remedial Reading; *Stereotypes; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The study involving 57 high school and elementary teachers investigated whether teachers hold different stereotypes for labeled remedial reading (RR) and labeled learning disabled (LD) students than for unlabeled students, and whether elementary and secondary teachers differ in the stereotypes they may hold regarding learning disabled and remedial reading students. When the labeled RR group was compared with the unlabeled group on the adjective checklist, the result was not significant. However, the trend shown in the raw data was for more positive adjectives to be assigned to the unlabeled group. When the labeled LD group was compared with the unlabeled LD group, the results were significant. It was concluded that teachers did differ between labeled and unlabeled LD students. Other findings were that neither group of teachers (elementary or secondary) could significantly identify the RR or the LD group; elementary teachers had a higher probability of holding a positive stereotype for normal students than secondary teachers; and teachers did not grade essays differently for disabled and normal students. (SBH)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED187045

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

STEREOTYPING OF LEARNING DISABLED AND
REMEDIAL READING STUDENTS BY TEACHERS

submitted by

Libby Cohen
Director of Special Education
Cape Elizabeth School District
Cape Elizabeth, Maine 04107

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Libby Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC124310

STEREOTYPING OF LEARNING DISABLED AND
REMEDIAL READING STUDENTS BY TEACHERS

It is widely accepted that when one person comes into contact with another there is a tendency to form generalizations. Each person in the interaction brings a set of attitudes and beliefs. These beliefs, when they are exaggerated or distorted, may compose a stereotype. If the person holding the stereotypic beliefs is a teacher, the effects of the expectations that the teacher holds may have unfortunate results in the classroom. If the effects of teacher expectations can be shown to clearly affect the behavior of the students whom they teach, then educational programs must take these effects into account.

A limited number of studies have been conducted that relate to stereotyping by teachers of students with handicapping conditions. Guskin (1962, 1963a, 1963b), in particular, has conducted research on stereotyping. Guskin's own interest in stereotyping is based on the theoretical considerations of Allport (1954). Gilling (1976); Foster, Ysseldyke & Reese (1975); Foster, Schmidt & Sabatino (1976); and Salvia, Clark & Ysseldyke (1973) demonstrated that experimentally induced stereotypes were held for individuals labeled emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, and mentally retarded.

Students are often labeled learning disabled or remedial reading. This study investigated whether teachers hold stereotypes of learning disabled and remedial reading students under

conditions of information about student achievement under labeled and unlabeled conditions. It was hypothesized that teachers will hold different stereotypes for labeled remedial reading and labeled learning disabled students than for unlabeled ones. Scranton & Downs (1975) suggested that secondary teachers were reluctant to identify and recognize learning disabled students. Wandt (1952) found that elementary teachers had more favorable attitudes than secondary teachers. This study also investigated whether elementary and secondary teachers differed in the stereotypes that may hold regarding learning disabled and remedial reading students. With the current controversy over the definition of learning disabilities, and who should teach a child with a learning disability, it is important to examine whether stereotypes exist when learning disabled students are compared to remedial reading students.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

Respondents of this study consisted of 57 teachers in a suburban school system. There were 25 high school teachers and 32 elementary teachers. Of the 57 teachers, there were 27 females and 30 males. There was a total of 5 learning disability teachers and 3 remedial reading teachers; 1 learning disability teacher and 1 remedial reading teacher taught at the

high school while 4 learning disability teachers and 2 remedial reading teachers were assigned to the elementary schools.

INSTRUMENTS

The first instrument was an adjective checklist, on the same page with one of three descriptions of students; a learning disabled student, a remedial reading student, and a student from the general population. One-third of the descriptions were accurately labeled "remedial reading", one-third were labeled "learning disabled" and one-third were labeled "High School Student". Each description contained a set of 15 bipolar adjectives which described characteristics that can be attributed to students. Teachers were given only one description and were asked to circle the adjectives that applied to the description presented. Instructions were written at the top of the page. The accurate label assignment was determined by using data from the cumulative record of an actual child who was typical of the group represented. Clinical judgement of a trained, experienced teacher was the basis of assuming the record was typical.

The second instrument included the essay which consisted of one of three paragraphs. One of them had been written by a remedial reading student; one had been written by a learning disabled student; and one had been written by a student from the general population. In the first month of the school year

paragraphs were composed during a writing session in a high school English class; they were written under the direction of the English class teacher. The students were not given any specific instructions other than to write an essay.

Selection of the three essays to be used for the study was done by the English teacher and the investigator, working together to select the three that seemed to best typify the type of child to be represented, remedial reading, learning disabled or normal. Both judges agreed that the essays selected were typical of the child being illustrated.

For presentation to respondents, identification of the classification of the student who wrote the paragraph was made for "remedial reading" student, "learning disabled" student, and "high school" student for one-half of each group. Each teacher received only one of the six forms. Instructions were written at the top of the page.

Because both of these instruments were administered at one time, it was thought that a possible "halo effect" from the adjective checklist might occur. That is, filling out the adjective checklist could have influenced grading the essays. In order to avoid this, some packets, randomly selected, only contained the essay. These were scored separately and compared with the responses given by the teachers who received both instruments.

Scores for the essays were: 67, 70, 73, 76, 79, 82, 85, 88, 91, 94, 97, and 100. These were written on the bottom of the

page and circled by the respondents. Scores for the adjective checklist were the total number of adjectives circled.

DATA ANALYSIS

The Mann-Whitney U test (Siegel, 1956) was selected for testing the hypotheses concerning the adjectives. It is one of the more powerful of the non-parametric tests and can be used when the number in cells are unequal and the data are not suitable for the other non-parametric tests. Medians were also computed for comparisons of adjective ratings. For comparisons of essay grades, t tests were used. The level of significance chosen for acceptance of the hypotheses was .05.

RESULTS

Results of the analysis of data obtained from the scores on the adjective checklist are reported in Table 1. When the labeled remedial reading group was compared with the unlabeled group the result was not statistically significant. However, the trend shown in the raw data was for more positive adjectives to be assigned to the unlabeled group. When the labeled learning disabled group was compared with the unlabeled learning disabled group the results were significant at the .028 level. Since this is beyond the selected level of significance, it was concluded that teachers did differ between labeled and unlabeled learning disabled students.

Table 1

Adjective Checklist Responses by Teachers for Labeled and
Unlabeled RR, LD, and N Students

Comparison	U	N	P
Labeled RR vs. Unlabeled RR	4	8	.17
Labeled LD vs. Unlabeled LD	0	7	.028
Labeled N vs. Unlabeled N	0	11	.003

Group	Median	N
Labeled RR	5.5	4
Labeled LD	13	3
Labeled N	15	8
Unlabeled RR	13	4
Unlabeled LD	6	4
Unlabeled N	15	4

The data obtained from the essays for the labeled and unlabeled remedial reading students resulted in a t of 2.195. As shown in Table 2, this is not significant at the selected level. When teachers graded essays of labeled and unlabeled remedial reading students, they did not differentiate between the groups.

Table 3 reports the results of an analysis of the data obtained on the adjective checklist for elementary and secondary teachers. When the ratings assigned by secondary teachers to remedial reading students were compared with those assigned by elementary teachers the results were not significant. The ratings of learning disabled students assigned by secondary teachers were compared with those of elementary teachers. This result was not significant. It can be concluded that secondary teachers do not differ from elementary teachers when they rated learning disabled students. An analysis of the scores assigned by secondary and elementary teachers to essays written by learning disabled, and remedial reading students was made. The results, reported in Table 4, showed that for both learning disabled and remedial reading students, secondary and elementary teachers did not differentiate among students when scoring essays.

Table 2

Essay Responses by Teachers for Labeled and Unlabeled RR,
LD, and N Students

Comparison	<u>t</u>	N	P
Labeled RR vs. Unlabeled RR	2.195	10	N.S
Labeled LD vs. Unlabeled LD	0	12	N.S
Labeled N vs. Unlabeled N	1.55	15	N.S

Group	<u>X</u>	N	S.D.
Labeled RR	68.8	5	2.683
Labeled LD	79	9	10.062
Labeled N	78.14	7	9.281
Unlabeled RR	72.4	5	2.51
Unlabeled LD	79	3	18.248
Unlabeled N	84.63	8	6.886

Table 3

Adjective Checklist Responses by Secondary and Elementary
Teachers for RR, LD, and N Students

Group	U	Median	N	P
Remedial Reading	6	10.5	8	.343
Learning Disabled	10	11	7	N.S
Normal	4	15	12	.015

Table 4

Essay Responses by Secondary and Elementary Teachers for
RR, LD, and N Students

Groups Rated by Secondary Teachers	$\bar{X}$	N	S.D.
Remedial Reading	70.6	5	3.912
Learning Disabled	79.5	6	11.76
Normal	79.5	6	8.78
Groups Rated by Elementary Teachers	$\bar{X}$	N	S.D.
Remedial Reading	70.6	5	2.51
Learning Disabled	78.5	6	12.5
Normal	83	9	8.48

The number of negative adjectives were examined that were assigned to each group, regardless of whether a label was given. Table 5 presents a summary of these adjectives. Using the chi square test, eight out of 15 adjectives were found to be significantly more often assigned to the disabled groups (remedial reading and learning disabled students) when they were compared to the normal group. These results can be interpreted to suggest a stereotype of disabled. The adjectives that compose this stereotype are: unpleasant, incompetent, cold, unattractive, distractible, impulsive, poor speaker, and inactive. However, there was no evidence that the stereotypes affected grading as represented by grades assigned to essays.

Table 5

Negative Adjectives Assigned by Teachers

Adjective	Disabled (RR & LD)	Normal	P
Unpleasant	8	1	.01
Incompetent	6	1	.02
Cold	6	1	.02
Unattractive	6	1	.02
Dull	5	0	-
Helpless	2	0	-
Abnormal	7	0	-
Distractible	12	1	.01
Clumsy	7	0	-
Impulsive	11	1	.01
Poor speaker	13	1	.01
Sloppy	10	0	-
Apathetic	6	0	-
Inactive	7	1	.01
Silly	6	8	-

DISCUSSION

In this study, labeling appeared to have complex effects. When learning disabled students, remedial reading (RR) students and normal students were compared, regardless of label, the normal students were rated more positively than the remedial reading students and more positively than the learning disabled students on adjective checklist. The results showed that when teachers were asked to assign ratings to students on the adjective checklist, the ratings were less positive. However, essay grades did not reflect this finding.

Foster, Schmidt, and Sabatino (1976) concluded that the label "learning disabled" generated a negative bias among classroom teachers when they viewed a videotape of a student. Teachers rated the behaviors of the student more negatively when they were told the student was learning disabled than when the student was labeled "normal". In the present study teacher grading of an academic task was not affected although descriptive adjectives demonstrated a teacher bias.

When labeled and unlabeled students were compared, the labeled learning disabled group was rated significantly higher than the unlabeled learning disabled on the adjective checklist only. While teachers assigned negative adjectives to the LD and RR groups when they were compared to normal students, the label "learning disabled" appeared to act as a "protective device"

for these students when they were compared to unlabeled ones. The labeled versus the unlabeled situation appeared to create a positive effect. Spielberg (1973) (quoting Emerson) wrote: "'To know him is to love him', appears to be especially true for children who are labeled slow, at least over a period of time". (p. 85) The findings in this study are consistent with Spielberg's results.

When the labeled RR group was compared to the unlabeled remedial reading group, the results, although not significant, showed a trend toward assignment of the more positive adjectives to the unlabeled group. When the labeled normal group was compared to the unlabeled normal group, the results were significant; unlabeled normal students received higher ratings than the labeled normal group. While the label "learning disabled" appeared to be an ameliorating mechanism for students, the labels "remedial reading" and "normal" did not have the same benefits.

It appeared that the label "learning disabled" may have generated sympathy toward the labeled learning disabled student. Teachers may have viewed the label as an indication of a dysfunction within the student, while the label "remedial reading" may have indicated to teachers that the student had difficulty with reading because he was "not trying" or "not behaving". On the other hand, there is the possibility that the label merely indicated to teachers that the learning disabled students could not and should not be expected to do good work.

Wandt (1962) found that elementary teachers had more favorable attitudes toward students than secondary teachers did. In this study, neither group of teachers could significantly identify the RR group or the LD group. However, secondary teachers and elementary teachers were found to hold stereotypes regarding students who were labeled "normal". The median for the elementary group was higher, and thus, it was concluded that elementary teachers had a higher probability of holding a positive stereotype for normal students than secondary teachers. Secondary and elementary teachers were not homogeneous in their attitudes toward students and on the criteria they used to judge a student's abilities. Perhaps, elementary teachers have become so sensitized to individual differences between students, due to the emphasis in child development and psychology courses in the teacher preparation curriculum of elementary teachers, that it is easier for them to identify a "normal" child. However, it should be noted that elementary teachers were rating high school students and this may account for the more positive adjectives assigned to the normal group.

The two questionnaires appeared to tap different ways that teachers evaluate students. While teachers readily graded the essays, they seemed reluctant to complete the adjective checklist. All of the hypotheses that were tested using the data from the essays yielded results that were not statistically significant. Evidently, teachers did not grade essays differently for disabled and normal students. However

once the achievement test information was added the stereotype of disabled emerged. It is possible that teachers expected to see a difference among essays but did not discriminate between the essays of the groups of students. Labeling the essays or not labeling them did not appear to influence grading them. Further research is needed in order to determine how much teachers rely on quantitative information about students. Qualitative information, such as was provided by the essays, does not elicit a stereotype. Is this because for these teachers, disabled student essays do not significantly differ from those of normal students or is it because teachers are unable to differentiate between the essays of these groups of students?

In view of practical implications from the classroom, assessment of the effects of the stereotyping by teachers should be made. This study suggests that teacher expectations (which are based on stereotypes) of learning disabled students and remedial reading students may need to be modified.

REFERENCES

- Allport, G.W., The Nature of Prejudice, Boston: Anchor, 1954.
- Foster, G., Ysseldyke, J., and Reese, J., I wouldn't have seen it if I hadn't believed it. Exceptional Children, 1975, 41, 469-473.
- Foster, G., Schmidt, C., and Sabatino, D., Teacher expectancies and the label "learning disabilities". Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1976, 9, 111-114.
- Gilling, T., The effects of labeled and unlabeled behavioral descriptions of handicapped children on teacher expectations. Dissertation Abstracts International, 1976, 36, 6599.
- Guskin, S., The perception of subnormality in mentally defective children. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 1962, 67, 53-60.
- Guskin, S., Measuring the strength of the stereotype of the mental defective. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 1963a, 67, 569-575.
- Guskin, S., Social psychologies of mental deficiencies. In N. Ellis (ed.) Handbook of Mental Deficiency, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963b, 325-352.
- Salvia, J., Clark, G. and Ysseldyke, J., Teacher retention of stereotypes of exceptionality. Exceptional Children, 1973, 39, 651-652.
- Scranton, T., and Downs, M., Elementary and secondary learning disabilities programs in the U.S.: a survey. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1975, 8, 394-399.
- Spielberg, I., Labeling, Teacher Expectations, Pupi Intelligent Level, and Conditions of Learning, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1973.
- Wandt, E., The measurement of teacher attitudes toward groups contacted in the school. Journal of Educational Research 1952, 46, 113-122.